



**The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Matthew 20:1-16**  
**September 20, 2020**  
*The Rev. Dr. Christian Brocato, Rector*

†May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Two Sunday's ago, I entitled my message, "The hard work of discipleship". Today, we might consider our Gospel reading as having much to do with 'work, hard work'.

The workers in the vineyard toiled in the field, some all day and some for a few hours. No matter what, they worked hard and got paid what was promised. At the end of the day, they went home having received wages that more than likely enabled them to just get by for another day. My guess is that the scenario started all over the following day and then the day after that.

The story presents us with a real challenge about justice. After reading a commentary last week about the passage, a phrase came to mind which is familiar: "Wake up and smell the coffee." We tend to read this Gospel passage from Matthew as a 'God story' with God being the gracious and benevolent landowner, one who is a just one hiring day laborers and paying them what was promised.

In the end, today's Gospel might be a wake-up call about the reality of life for millions of workers all around the world. There are the sweat shops in Bangladesh or other parts of the world where even children are hard at work on a daily basis. There are business owners who continue to make money on the backs of poorly paid workers around the corner from where some of us live. There are the migrant workers in the west and in the south who long to work and get paid enough to feed their children. There are people working in coffee shops or pizza shops making a minimum wage, some with little hope for the future.

All these examples and many more are examples of our sisters and brothers who wake up every day to "smell the coffee" of hard work with little reward. Then, there are the tens of million out of work across our nation and the world.

Today, Jesus is telling his disciples and us to "Wake up..." with an image of a business owner who for me is not a benevolent god but someone who is unjust and divisive. The owner seems to almost gloat at his ability to hire and then dismiss with a kind of callousness which is stunning. If this offends a time-honored interpretation of this Gospel as an image of a just God, then, I invite you see the passage in a different light.

As some of you know, I grew up in the south near the Delta of the Mississippi River where there were plantations of acres and acres of cotton. I have visual images of day workers, bused in Latinos, who toiled in the extreme hot sun picking cotton for little reward. At the end of the day, they faced the next day with the same scenario to be played out once again. Many years later, I came to realize that those day laborers were not unlike the slaves of old who toiled day after day across the South and elsewhere as landowners grew in wealth year after year. Many years ago, I faced the reality of that culture and how it is perpetuated even today.

The Gospel of Jesus is not meant to make us comfortable. It is meant to challenge us to see the world as it is and to make it better.

The Gospel of Jesus is about a kingdom of love, a reign of love, attainable and realized through the hard work of discipleship. The Gospel of Jesus is about forming and molding a community of faith even in the midst of a tragic pandemic, even in the midst of the virtual reality in which we find ourselves. Make no mistake, we at St. Mark's are awake and smell the coffee of the world in which we live. We recognize the difficult task of stewarding a religious tradition that is over 2,000 years old and that is more difficult than we could have imagined.

Today's Gospel challenges us to look with discernment and truth at the world in which we live. It challenges us to see clearly the good in the world and the bad in the world. It challenges us to seek leaders who are honest, truthful, fair and just and who can and will lead us to a better tomorrow. It challenges us to "Wake up and smell the coffee" and to share that richness of the amora and taste with others. That's the stewardship of all believers in a nutshell!

You and I are stewards of a time-honored religious tradition that is rich in amora and taste. That religious tradition challenges us to be who God calls us to be as followers of Jesus.

Jesus was a reformer, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He is the beloved One of God who loves all people no matter who they are, the color of their skin or any other distinction we choose to make. God's love in Jesus is freely given to all.

Today, we celebrate the time-honored tradition of the Holy Eucharist as part of our Celebration Sunday. I don't know about you, but I need a celebration! Until we can all gather around the Table of the Lord to feast together, we will 'fast' from physically communing with the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We will celebrate it as Jesus offers it to God on our behalf, and as we spiritually share it with one another. The arrangement before us is meant to enable us to consider a closer physical relationship with what will soon take place at the altar. Together, we will celebrate the gifts of God for the people of God, the Body and Blood of Jesus.

I believe we need to celebrate. I believe we need to take hold of the joy we have in Jesus and one another and give thanks.

What will you and I do today and the coming week to give thanks for the love we share in Jesus? What changes might we consider in our lives so that the Gospel of Love can and will take hold in us? Will we pray more and allow the truth of the Gospel to propel us into action for the sake of love?

I see us in the midst of today's Gospel. We are laborers in the vineyard and are called to bare the fruit of the vine we call Jesus into the world. God's grace empowers us to do that. Let us embrace it, make it our own and make a difference for the sake of love, for the sake of life. Amen.



For further reflection, I invite you to see: [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4574](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4574)